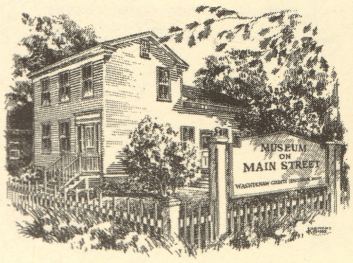

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857 • NOVEMBER 2005

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INFORMATION
Published Seven Times A Year From September-May.

Museum On Main Street
500 N. Main Street at Beakes Street
Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

Phone: 734.662.9092
Fax 734.663.0039
Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net
Web Site:
www.washtenawhistory.org

Annual dues: January-December individual, $15; couple/family $25; student or senior (60+) $10; senior couple $19; business/association $50; patron $100.

JUDITH CHRISMAN • PRESIDENT'S LETTER

New Director And Donations!

At the October board meeting, Laura Bien, a reporter for the Ann Arbor Observer, was appointed to fill the Director vacancy created by the resignation of Patricia Austin. Laura will be the new editor of the Impressions and will also manage our website. Be sure and take a look at the new features on our website: www.washtenawhistory.org. The Board wishes to thank Patricia for serving and wish her well in her many endeavors.

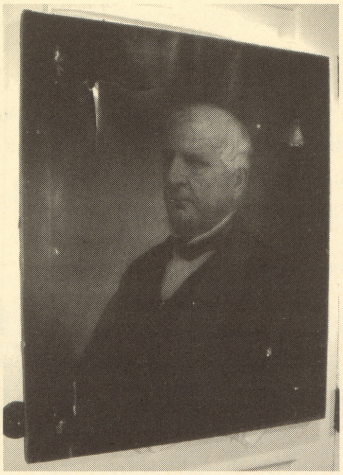
We have received several new donations: the wedding dress of Louise Smith Thayer from her June 12, 1925 wedding to Lyle Thayer (parents of Stuart Thayer, past board member and curator) donated by Nancy Thayer Ross; box of glass slides found in a garage donated by Wesley Muthig; yearbooks (3 from Ann Arbor High School, one from U of M and one from Michigan Normal) donated by Sydney Sivers; a paper fan advertisement from Arnet's Cemetery Monuments and three packages of seed from Vitality Seeds of Ann Arbor donated by Susan Wineberg.

Seed packet from Vitality Seeds, Ann Arbor, MI.
photo by Judy Chrisman

Congratulations to Cynthia Yao, one of WCHS's directors, on her induction into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame. She is one of the founders of the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum which opened in 1982 and was the executive director until 2001.

Can You Help?

The Board of Directors has established a Painting Restoration Fund for our collection of oil paintings, mostly portraits. Many of them need cleaning and several need repair. The first one we want to get restored is the portrait of the Honorable James Kingsley, who came to Ann Arbor in 1826. He was one of the first practicing lawyers and a judge of probate. It was painted by Katie J. Rogers, a local accomplished artist in 1879 from a photograph. There are several tears in the canvas.



Honorable James Kingsley
photo by Judy Chrisman

We are also seeking donations to help with the restoration project. Since our plea first appeared in the April 2005 newsletter, we have gotten three responses. For information please call: 734 / 662-9092

H.MARK HILDEBRANDT • SPEAKER
LAURA BIEN

Trains And Trolleys Of Ann Arbor

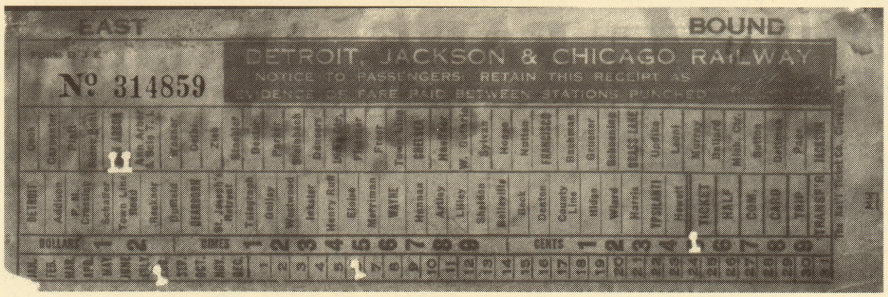
A streetcar travels down North Main, past a child staying well out of its way. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

A TEEN SALVAGES THE PAST

The sixteen-year-old boy stopped his bike in a forlorn area off Telegraph Road near Pontiac. He peered intently at the rusted metal abandoned diner, its broken windows conduits for the wind. Already a train nut in high school, the boy recognized the dead diner as a onetime early 20th-century interurban rail car, later converted to a greasy spoon and now, at mid-century, a forgotten ruin.

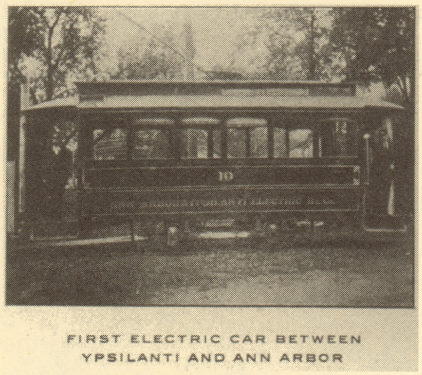
The boy looked around: the coast was clear. He crept up to the structure, stashed his bike, and tested the door, which gave. He slipped into the dusty car and examined the interior, faded and aged by years of weather. Exploring, he pried up one of the window-ledges. In the niche underneath, he spotted an original fare card, decades old, from the days when interurbans ferried Ann Arborites all over Southeastern Michigan.

This fare card is now an item in the extensive rail-related collection of Ann Arbor Train and Trolley Watchers founder and retired local pediatrician Mark Hildebrandt. Decades after his boyhood exploration of the dead diner, Hildebrandt gave an October 16, 2005 talk on local trolleys and interurbans with all the enthusiasm of a 16-year-old discovering treasures.



THE EARLY DAYS

Beginning in 1890 and continuing until the 1920s, Ann Arbor public transportation consisted of an intracity streetcar perambulating in a loop around the downtown and campus area, and access to the extensive interurban rail car lines that connected the city to Jackson, Chelsea, Saline, Detroit, and other communities. Hildebrandt showed a slide of the earliest streetcar, an elegant 1890 wooden model. The slide was made from "a glass plate that was uncovered by Sam Sturgis when he was doing his efforts to bring up pictures of early Ann Arbor," noted Hildebrandt.



Ann Arbor's first electric streetcar, at State Street and North University. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

Built in 1890 by a group of investors, the electric city streetcar ran on rails, drawing its power from a pole reaching upwards to overhanging electric lines. This five-car operation ran from the Michigan Central station (now the Gandy Dancer), up Detroit Street to north on Catherine, south on Main to East William, east to State Street, south to Monroe and on to East University Avenue and Hill St. Hildebrandt dis-

DJ&C Fare receipt. Photo by H. Mark Hildebrandt

played a slide of the route looping through town.

The curving driveway at Hill and Washtenaw, just behind the famous "Rock" painted almost daily by U-M students, marks part of the route. Hildebrandt showed a shot of the curving drive, saying, "The car line came around here, and you can still see the cracks in the pavement where the rails were ripped up in 1942 for scrap iron for the war. And this was Washtenaw, with the car tracks down the [middle]—looks like it was a dirt road." From Hill, the cars ran up Washtenaw to North University, south on State, and ultimately back to Detroit Street, where the onetime track route, patched with brick, is clearly visible in Detroit Street's cobbles next to Argiero's. The cars' home was a car-barn opposite the present-day Treasure Mart. A separate line covered west Huron and Packard.

In 1894, a disastrous car-barn fire burned all 5 of the cars. The streetcar was out of business for a couple of years, until new cars were purchased.

Two sorts of seasonal cars were used: the open (windowless) car for summer, and the closed car for winter. In the summer, people enjoyed riding the open cars around town to cool off from their non-air-conditioned homes. Hildebrandt showed a shot of one such open car. "These had seats all the way across, 'toast rack,' they called them, and there's the running board." The running board was an exterior platform running the length of the car from which the conductor collected fares. In the winter, some closed cars had stoves aboard, with the stovepipe poking through the roof. Hildebrandt pointed out examples of each car's two-man crew of motorman and conductor.

Ann Arbor's streetcar ran from 1890 until January of 1925, when a second fire destroyed the new car barn at Wells and Lincoln, by the present-day Burns Park. Five of the six existing cars were saved, but since the streetcar wasn't earning much money, a decision was made to shift to buses. As a memorial to their demise, the streetcars formed a parade for one last trip. On the side of the cars hung banners saying, "Goodbye Folks: It's the Scrap Heap for Mine" [sic].

THE INTERURBANS

As the Ann Arbor streetcar moved people around town, at the same time busy interurbans, zipping along at 40 to 60 miles an hour, shuttled Ann Arborites to neighboring communities all over southeastern Michigan and beyond. You could even take the interurbans to Chicago—if you didn't mind a week-long journey by way of Dayton.

In 1891, Ann Arbor Courier editor, longtime U-M regent, and town promoter Junius Beal and friends built the state's first interurban. The steam-powered line between Ypsi and Ann Arbor was named the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Electric Railway, soon nicknamed the "Ypsi-Ann." Hildebrandt showed a picture of Beal. "He was a bicycler, and he and his friends would spend the summer in Europe, cycling around Europe, and a number of these steam dummies [trains] were built out from the main part of town of many of the cities in Europe." Beal brought the idea home. The venture was successful, and in 1895 the line was converted from steam to the much cleaner electricity. The route ran from Harriet Street, on Ypsilanti's south side, to north on Washington, west on Cross to Packard, and stopped at the then-Ann Arbor city limit at Packard and Brooklyn.

This view of Ypsilanti's Washington Street shows the interurban's tracks in the cobbled street and the wires overhead. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

The line's car barn occupied the north side of Michigan Avenue just east of Huron Street and the river in Ypsilanti. "The back of the car house had the generators, steam generators, for the entire line all the way out from Detroit to Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and Jackson," noted Hildebrandt. One slide shows that the site is now a car dealership. The power generated by the power plant was relayed along the lines by electrical wires leading to substations every 10 or 15 miles, which served as transformers converting the powerful AC current to the milder DC current used by the cars. Hildebrandt showed a modern-day picture of one substation, noting "this is the building that still exists at Lima Center, which was the interurban substation between Ann Arbor and Chelsea."

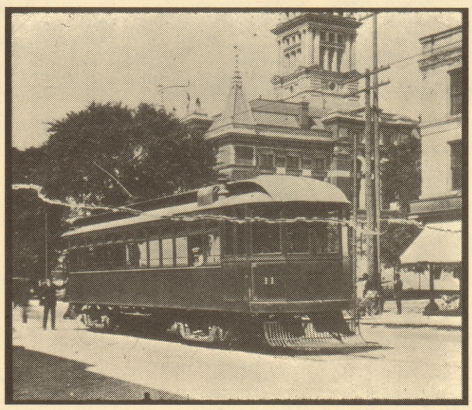
An interurban on Congress St. (now Michigan Ave.) in Ypsilanti rolls past its nemesis, the automobile. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

The Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Electric Railway Company expanded in 1897 with a line following the south side of Michigan Avenue into Detroit, changing its name to the Detroit, Ypsilanti, and Ann Arbor Electric Railway. It opened a new station at Main and Huron (now the Greyhound bus station). A line was built between Ypsilanti and Saline in 1899, and the DY&AA extended a branch to Jackson in 1901.

This local network fitted into a vast system of interurbans in Southeastern Michigan run by a company called Detroit United, who also ran Detroit's intracity streetcars. DU's lines extended to Imlay City, Port Huron, Flint, Pontiac, Toledo, and elsewhere. In 1907, DU bought the entire local Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti-Jackson system, as well as Ann Arbor's intracity streetcars. Though the interurbans were profitable, Ann Arbor's intracity streetcar was not. As a result, Detroit United didn't do much to maintain Ann Arbor's internal streetcar system. If a new car was needed, DU would often supply an old one recycled from some other line, instead of a new one.

DANGEROUS TRANSPORTATION

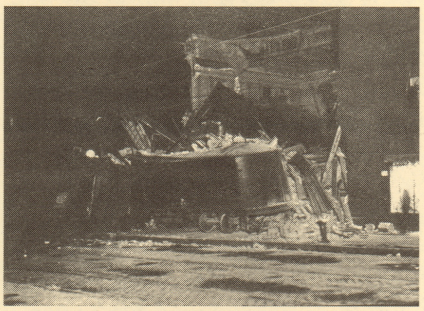
Streetcars were dangerous because of their weak brake. This was merely a hand brake that the motorman would hurl his weight against in an attempt to stop the car. Hildebrandt showed a slide of a car whose front end held a large scoop made of L-shaped wire bars. "Up at the front, we had a fender, or you want to call it a "people-catcher," not like the cow-catcher on a locomotive, but this little wire basket. The front of it would knock someone off their feet, and then they fall against this protective thing, so that they weren't going to be crushed under the wheels."



Ann Arbor street car at Main and Huron, showing the "people-catcher. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

Though well-meant, a speeding rack of metal bars slamming into people is not exactly what we think of today as a safety device.

Local interurbans were involved in two major accidents. One involved the freight car service that the interurbans ran at night, after passenger service ended for the day. On August 5, 1927, two sets of two cars were pulled uphill on Huron to a siding in modern-day Veteran's Park. As the cars were being recoupled at the siding, they slipped loose and began rolling back downhill, faster and faster as they traveled the mile back to downtown. At Main Street, where the track curved, the cars jumped the track and smashed into the Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank at Main and Huron, demolishing the bank's entire façade.



A dramatic night-time shot of the destruction to the Farmer's and Mechanic's Bank near Huron and Main. Photos from Ross Campbell collection of images from Bentley Historical Library

Tragedy struck in 1917 on the interurban line between Ann Arbor and Chelsea. As the regular interurban left the Chelsea station and headed into the country, an extra car from Fort Custer headed towards Chelsea on the same line. The cars collided head-on, killing 17 people. One of the fatalities was Theodore Stanger, father of longtime Ann Arbor News photographer Max Stanger. Theodore Stanger had written some novelettes, and one features the interurban station in downtown Detroit. "Little did he know he was going to be wiped out by an interurban accident," noted Hildebrandt.

END OF THE INTERURBANS

The interurbans stopped running in the end of 1928, and they still ran freight service for another year, and the tracks stayed in the pavements of the towns all along the way—in 1942 for the scrap drive for the war effort they pulled up the track," said Hildebrandt.

Though the interurbans and streetcars vanished shortly before the Depression, one tiny local rail line continued operation from 1915 until 1969. Hildebrandt showed a slide of a squat, powerful-looking engine. "That was the University of Michigan electric railroad, and here's the electric engine that they bought in 1915, to carry the coal cars up from the Michigan Central railroad." Beginning at the Michigan Central line just north of the hospital complex, the U-M line curved up onto campus and ended at the still-existing powerhouse, where coal-fired boilers generated steam that was piped all over campus. The line replaced the electric engine with a gas engine, which, it turns out, could only push one coal car at a time. "So when they found this wasn't working very well, they bought a 55-ton surplus US Navy General Electric diesel engine, which could then run two cars up the hill," said Hildebrandt, showing a slide of a boxy, powerful-looking engine.

Hildebrandt ended his talk with a wrap-up of successful modern-day light rail systems in Chicago, Pittsburgh, and San Diego, pointing out one sign on a car that says, "Take Twice a Day to Relieve Congestion." As Southeastern Michigan struggles with clogged freeways and ever-expanding commute times, one wonders if our onetime system of fleet interurbans and convenient streetcars might possibly rise again.

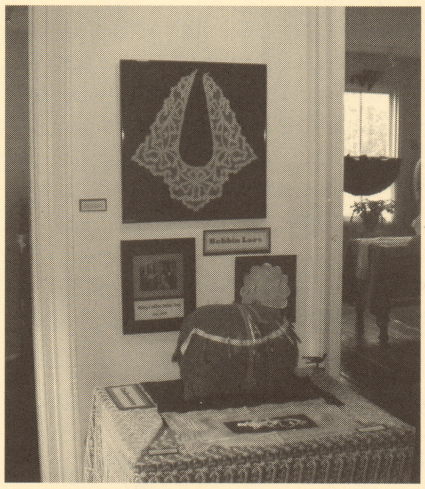
ALICE CERNIGLA • WCHS MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET
OCTOBER 26, 2005 -- JANUARY 18, 2006

The Sewing Arts

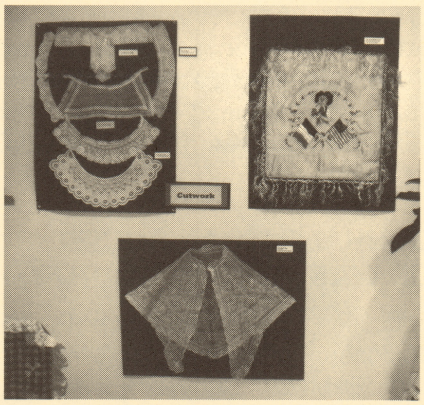
What kind of needlework did your mother, grandmother, great-grand relations do? Did they enjoy it, hate it, have to do it, or look forward to the time they would spend with a needle.

Needlework is the thread that connects women through all the centuries of our history, no matter how much our lifestyles change. We have always shared that passion or, at times, the necessity. Needlework has been represented in and throughout history in some form or other. The likes and attitudes of the current time make way for changes and innovations in design and technique. Some die out but all or almost all have left their mark. This is the only way that women through the centuries can connect.

In the Sewing Arts exhibit, we will be displaying examples of needlework from our collection and using them to tell the history of needlework in America. Each piece tells a story of the customs and fashion of the time it was made. We have some history of the provenance of the pieces but it would be more informative if we could ask the makers the story behind their pieces. Let this be a lesson to the future. Don't forget to document your work. Sign or label your pieces and keep a journal—written or photographs. Tell your stories to your children so that we can continue to be united with our embellished past.



Framed Battenburg lace and pillow for making bobbin lace. photo by Judy Chrisman



Samples of needlework. photo by Judy Chrisman

Dress with handmade lace and embroidery belonged to Mrs. Filibert Roth, wife of the founder of U. of M. School of Forestry. photo by Judy Chrisman

Announcements

WATERLOO AREA FARM MUSEUM "CHRISTMAS ON THE FARM."

9998 Waterloo-Munith Rd., Waterloo Twp. (517) 596-2254.
Saturday, December 3, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.,
& Sunday, December 4, noon-5 p.m.

Tour the various buildings on the grounds, see traditional German decorations, examine hearth cooking in the little log cabin, and tour the big farmhouse where costumed interpreters discuss the various rooms. Don't forget to ask for the grim story behind the wooden wheelchair in the attic.

KEMPF HOUSE MUSEUM "GERMAN CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE."

312 S. Division St., Ann Arbor. (734) 994-4898.
Weekends, December 3, 4, 10, & 11, 1-4 p.m.

See traditional German decorations and 19th-century period furnishings throughout the house. Make sure you catch the traditional German feather tree.

COBBLESTONE FARM "COUNTRY CHRISTMAS."

2781 Packard Rd., Ann Arbor. (734) 994-2928.
Sunday, December 4, noon-4 p.m.

See nineteenth-century Christmas decorations and pioneer cooking demonstrations, and enjoy live music. Costumed interpreters give tours of the farm house and log cabin (don't forget to visit the animals in the barnyard).

GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHTENAW COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Education Center Auditorium Parking Lot P,
St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Campus
5305 Elliott Dr., Superior Township, Michigan
Sunday, December 4, 2005 1:30 p.m.

Karen Drugman will present **"Dying to Get In There."** The class to follow will be a panel of GSWC members on **Getting Organized.**

Sunday, January 22, 2006 1:30 p.m.

Dr. Brian Dunnigan, curator at the William L. Clements Library at U of M, will speak on **"Michigan Maps."** The class to follow will be a panel of GSWC members sharing information about **Researching in Pennsylvania.**

RENTSCHLER FARM MUSEUM "CHRISTMAS ON THE FARM."

7640 E. Michigan Ave., Saline. (734) 769-2219.
Saturday, December 10, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.,
& Sunday, December 11, 1-4 p.m.

See Depression-era decorations and period cooking demos in this century-old sheep farm. Refreshments

In Memoriam

Dorothy Ellen Lyndon Wilkins, a member of WCHS and mother of WCHS treasurer, Patricia Wilkins Creal and grandmother of director-at-large, Julie Creal Goodridge, died on October 4, 2005. She was born October 11, 1914 and was the daughter of Alford Lyndon, a well-known local photographer.

A Glimpse Of A Winter Of Yesteryear

Men harvest Huron River ice and load it on the Michigan Central Railroad, near Ypsilanti, 1915.

Membership For 2006

The membership letters will be mailed immediately after the New Year for January through December 2006.

Volunteer Opportunities

GARDEN – Several volunteers are needed to carry out the plans of our volunteer Master Gardener. This would include planting, weeding, watering (on a regular basis) and general maintenance during the growing season. In past years the garden has been a showplace.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE – We would like to develop a team to do minor repairs, painting and odd jobs.

OFFICE ORGANIZER – We need someone to maintain the Society files.

MUSEUM GREETERS – Welcome museum visitors during open hours, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 PM. Work as often as you like – at least one day or one weekend per month preferred, but any help would be welcomed.

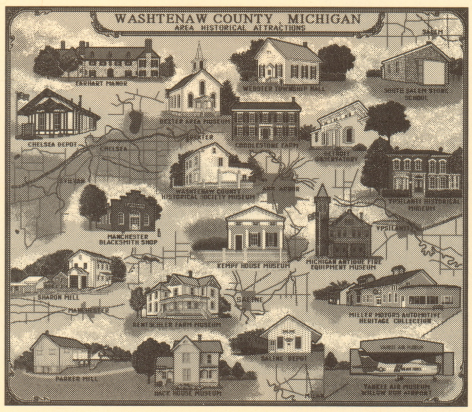
MEMBERSHIP – A person with computer skills who can keep up the membership lists, prepare mailing labels for post cards (seven times yearly), newsletter (seven times yearly) and membership drive (January and February). In mid-summer there is a fundraising mailing, also.

EXHIBIT RESEARCH & PREPARATION – Help with research and development of upcoming exhibits.

LIBRARIAN – Organize research library and museum books in our collection. Continue the indexing of previous newsletters. One set of indices is author, subject, title and the other is a name index.

FUNDRAISING / GRANT WRITING: We are seeking creative people that enjoy the challenge of these activities.

Historical Gift Suggestions



Throw

Our Washtenaw County Historical Society gift shop doesn't just offer a variety of interesting local history books. We also have Christmas ornaments, children's toys, postcards, and one-of-a-kind items

Our throws are $50 each and are available at the Museum on Main Street and from other historical society groups in Washtenaw County.

These throws are woven in North Carolina of 100% cotton and are 60 inches by 50 inches. There are 19 images of buildings of groups that are members of the Washtenaw County Consortium. Mailing by US Priority Mail is available for $8.00 each. For additional information: www.washtenawhistory.org and click on Gift Shop or call 734 / 662-9092.

Some of the books we offer for sale include:

ARGOMANIA *by Henry Gambino. A history of this well-loved camera and the company behind it. Just in!* $40

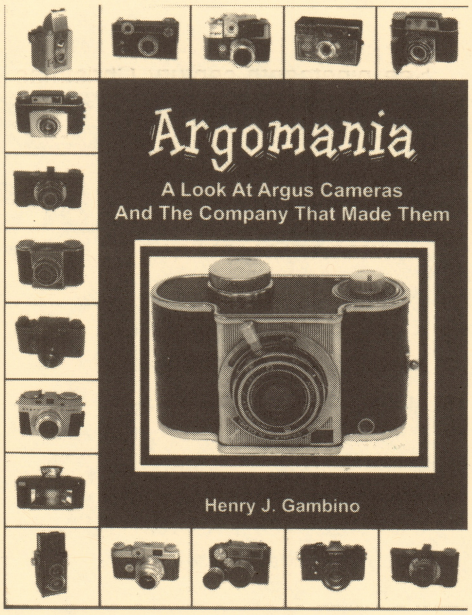
ANN ARBOR IN THE 19TH CENTURY. by Grace Shackman A pictorial history of Ann Arbor. 128 pp. $20

ANN ARBOR IN THE 20TH CENTURY. by Grace Shackman A pictorial history of Ann Arbor. 128 pp. $20

BIRDSEYE MAP OF ANN ARBOR, MI-1880. 24 by 30 in. Rolled & in tube. $10

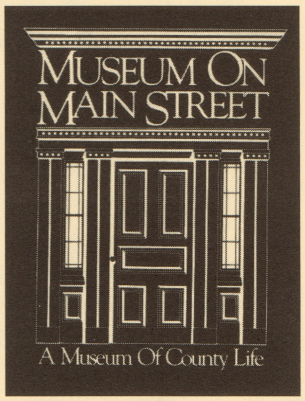
HISTORIC BUILDINGS: Ann Arbor, MI. by Marjorie Reade & Susan Wineberg. 232 pp. $15

LOST ANN ARBOR: by Susan Wineberg. Buildings that have been demolished. 128 pp. $20



"Argomania", a look at Argus Cameras and the company that made them.

THE INDIANS OF WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI. 1927 by W. B. Hinsdale. 68 pp. $7



WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

SUNDAY • 2 PM
FEBRUARY 19, 2006

"COBBLESTONE STRUCTURES"

SPEAKERS • GRACE SHACKMAN & PATRICIA MAJHER

COBBLESTONE FARM BARN
2781 PACKARD • ANN ARBOR
INFORMATION • 734.662.9092

YOU ARE INVITED
OPEN HOUSE
SEWING ARTS EXHIBIT
Sunday, December 11,2005
Noon – 4 PM

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
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NANCY KROHN
905 ROBIN RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-3008

Program Schedule 2005-2006

Sunday, Nov. 20 • 2 pm
EARHART MANOR
Speaker: *David Kennedy*
Location: Earhart Manor, 4090 Geddes Rd, AA

Sunday, February 19, 2006 • 2 pm
COBBLESTONE STRUCTURES
Speaker: *Grace Shackman & Patricia Majher*
Location: Cobblestone Farm Barn, 2781 Packard

Sunday, March 19 • 2 pm
NAME ORIGINS of LOCAL STREETS/ROADS
Speaker: *Jeff Mortimer*
Location: University Commons, 817 Asa Gray, AA

Sunday, April 23 • 2 pm
COMBINED MEETING of GSWC & WCHS
Topics of interest
Location: Education Bldg, SJMH, Parking Lot 'P'

May 2006
WCHS ANNUAL MEETING
Potluck supper & election of officers • Date & location to be determined

Suggestions appreciated
Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to foster interest in and to elucidate the history of Washtenaw County from the time of the original inhabitants to the present. Its mission shall be to carry out the mandate as stated through the preservation and presentation of artifacts and information by exhibit, assembly, and publication. And to teach, especially our youth, the facts, value and the uses of Washtenaw County history through exhibits in museums and classrooms, classes, tours to historical places, and other educational activities.